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Message Text

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21
ACTION ARA-20

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SAB-01 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03

INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-10 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SPC-03

SS-20 USIA-15 SAM-01 OMB-01 COA-02 COME-00 EB-11

TRSE-00 AID-20 IGA-02 DLOS-06 IO-14 FEA-02 INT-08

SCI-06 DRC-01 /173 W
---------- 043367
R 012208Z FEB 74
FM AMEMBASSY PANAMA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9686
INFO AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES
AMEMBASSY LIMA

C O N F I D E N T I A L PANAMA 0666

EO 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, PN, AR, PE
SUBJ: TORRIJOS' TRAVELS -- AN ASSESSMENT OF
THE ARGENTINA AND PERU TRIP.

SUMMARY: IN TERMS OF PANAMANIAN INTERESTS AND IMAGE, THE JANUARY 15-25 VISIT OF CHIEF OF GOVERNMENT TORRIJOS TO ARGENTINA AND PERU WAS A REASONABLE SUCCESS. OFFICIALLY UNDERTAKEN TO THANK THE TWO COUNTRIES FOR THEIR SUPPORT OF PANAMA'S POSITION ON THE CANAL ISSUE, THE TRIP PROVIDED TORRIJOS WITH THE OPPORTUNITY TO UNDERLINE THAT SUPPORT AND THE OCCASION TO ENHANCE HIS PRESTIGE AT HOME AND ABROAD. BOTH ARGENTINA AND PERU OFFERED TORRIJOS FRIENDLY CROWDS AND EXTENSIVE EXPOSURE, AND BOTH SEEMED NOT TO EXPECT TOO MUCH IN RETURN. END SUMMARY.

1. TRAVELING IN RESPONSE TO INVITATIONS FROM PRESIDENTS PERON AND VELASCO, PANAMANIAN CHIEF OF GOVERNMENT OMAR TORRIJOS PAID OFFICIAL VISITS TO ARGENTINA JANUARY 15-19
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AND PERU JANUARY 20-25. ACCOMPANIED BY MRS. TORRIJOS AND AN ENTOURAGE OF TWENTY-SIX OFFICIALS, NEWSMEN AND

Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005

Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005

REPRESENTATIVES OF OTHER SECTORS, THE GENERAL'S VISITS WERE BUSY AFFAIRS WITH FULL SCHEDULES OF CALLS, CONVERSATIONS, INTERVIEWS AND SOCIAL EVENTS. EACH VISIT ENDED WITH THE ISSUANCE OF A JOINT DECLARATION ESPOUSING COMMON POSITIONS ON A WIDE RANGE OF SUBJECTS. EXCELLENT COVERAGE BY EMBASSIES BUENOS AIRES AND LIMA HAS PROVIDED THE HIGHLIGHTS AND ATMOSPHERICS OF BOTH STOPS, WHILE BUENOS AIRES 0480 AND LIMA 0680 CONTAIN SUMMARIES OF THE JOINT DECLARATIONS.

2. AS AN IMAGE BUILDING EXERCISE -- WHICH IT WAS -- THE TRIP WAS LARGELY SUCCESSFUL FROM THE PANAMANIAN STAND-POINT. BOT HOST GOVERNMENTS HAD SOMETHING TO GAIN FROM A TORRIJOS VISIT -- IF ONLY HIS PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR MATTERS OF PRIMARY INTEREST TO THEM -- AND THEY OFFERED HIM FRIENDLY CROWDS AND EXTENSIVE EXPOSURE. LOCAL MEDIA COVERAGE OF THE TRIP FULLY REFLECTED THAT EXPOSURE, AND IT WAS EVIDENT THAT IT HAD PROVIED THE EXPECTED OCCASION FOR BOOSTING THE PRESTIGE AND INTERNATIONAL STANDING OF PANAMA AND THE GENERAL.

3. ON THE SUBSTANTIVE SIDE, THE TWO VISITS PRINCIPALLY PROVIDED THE GOP AN OPPORTUNITY TO PUBLICALLY UNDERLINE ARGENTINE AND PERUVIAN BACKING OF PANAMA'S ASPIRATIONS RE-GARDING THE CANAL. THE OFFICIAL REASON FOR THE TRIP WAS TO THANK THE TWO GOVERNMENTS AND PEOPLES FOR THEIR SUPPORT AND IT WAS NOT UNEXPECTED WHEN IT ALSO PRODUCED FURTHER EXPRESSIONS OF THAT SUPPORT. THAT NEITHER JOINT DECLARA-TION WENT BEYOND REITERATING PREVIOUSLY STATED POSITIONS, HOWEVER, IS ATTRIBUTABLE TO THE GOP'S DESIRE TO AVOID ANY ACTION WHICH MIGHT DISTURB THE CURRENT HIGHLY POSITIVE CLIMATE FOR TREATY NEGOTIATIONS. EVEN TORRIJOS' OFF-THE-CUFF STATEMENTS WERE BASICALLY LIMITED TO VERSIONS OF HIS FAVORITE SAYINGS, AND NOTHING HE SAID -- AT LEAST IN PUBLIC -- APPEARED DESIGNED TO STIR CONTROVERSY.

4. THE OTHER ASPECT OF THE TRIP WAS TO EXPLORE ECONOMIC AND COMMERCIAL POSSIBILITIES. BUSINESSMEN IN THE PARTY ALSO REPORTEDLY HAD THE ASSIGNMENT OF EXPLAINING THE PANAMANIAN REVOLUTION TO THEIR COUNTERPARTS. PERHAPS
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BECAUSE PANAMANIAN-PERUVIAN COOPERATION HAS BEEN PLACED IN A "REVOLUTIONARY" CONTEXT THAT APPEALS TO BOTH SIDES, THERE WAS MORE TO SHOW FROM THE LIMA STOP. AN AGREEMENT WAS SIGNED ON INDUSTRIAL FISHING COOPERATION AND THERE WERE HINTS OF MORE PERUVIAN ASSISTANCE IN THE OFFING. WHETHER ANYTHING OF ECONOMIC OR COMMERCIAL SIGNIFICANCE FLOWS FROM THE BUENOS AIRES VISIT REMAINS TO BE SEEN. TORRIJOS, HOWEVER, WAS REPORTEDLY MUCH MORE IMPRESSED WITH THE POPULAR ENTHUSIASM HE ENCOUNTERED IN ARGENTINA THAN WITH THE RECEPTION IN PERU.

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5. COMMENT. THE GOP SEEMS TO HAVE FOUND IN FOREIGN TRAVEL BY TORRIJOS BOTH A CONVENIENT AND REASONABLY EFFECTIVE WAY OF ENHANCING ITS INTERNATIONAL IMAGE WITHOUT JEOPARDIZING TREATY NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE U.S. AS DID HIS EUROPEAN TRIP IN SEPTEMBER, TORRIJOS' LATEST TRIP PROVIDED HIM WITH A CHANCE TO BRING PANAMA'S CASE TO A WIDER AUDIENCE AND IN THE PROCESS BUILD HIS OWN STANDING IN THE WORLD AND DOMESTIC OPINION.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: ITINERARY, PRESS COMMENTS, HEAD OF GOVERNMENT VISITS, FOREIGN POLICY POSITION, PANAMA CANAL TREATY, FISHING AGREEMENTS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 01 FEB 1974
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: golinofr
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1974PANAMA00666
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: n/a
From: PANAMA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1974/newtext/t19740262/aaaacfxz.tel
Line Count: 125
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE
Office: ACTION ARA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: golinofr
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 04 SEP 2002
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <04 SEP 2002 by boyleja>; APPROVED <10 DEC 2002 by golinofr>; APPROVED <10 DEC 2002 by golinofr>
Review Markings:

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EO Systematic Review
30 JUN 2005

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: TORRIJOS' TRAVELS -- AN ASSESSMENT OF THE ARGENTINA AND PERU TRIP.
TAGS: PFOR, PN, AR, PE
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005

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